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# FOOD SAFETY

for the family

ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH INSPECTION SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

keep food  
**HOT**  
**COLD**  
**CLEAN**

# FOOD SAFETY FOR THE FAMILY

## Keep Food Hot—Cold—Clean

You've been up half the night with an upset stomach. Your head feels as if it's going to burst and you ache all over. You figure you've picked up "the flu bug" or "that virus that's going around." Right?

Maybe. Maybe not. A lot of people do get the flu. But a lot of people who think they have the flu are really suffering from a mild case of food poisoning. If you are sick for more than a day or so, check with a doctor. It doesn't pay to take chances.

There probably isn't much you can do to prevent the flu except get vaccinated. But you can prevent food poisoning.

Preventing food poisoning starts when you buy food at the supermarket. You have to keep working to prevent food poisoning as you store, cook, and serve that food. But the job isn't really so hard. You need to remember three simple rules: Keep food clean. Keep food cold. Keep food hot.

### KEEP FOOD HOT

Most germs that cause food poisoning are killed when you boil, broil, or roast foods. However, when food stays warm for 2 hours or longer, some germs produce poisons that are not destroyed by heating. So, once food is cooked, keep it hot until served and refrigerate leftovers at once. Food left at room temperatures for more than 2 hours (including time to prepare) allows germs to grow to dangerous numbers. These germs seldom change the taste, odor, or looks of food.

## **KEEP FOOD COLD**

Germ's can't multiply very fast if the storage temperature is 40° F. or below. So, store meat, poultry, eggs, milk, and cheese in the refrigerator. At the supermarket, always pick up meat, poultry, and dairy products last and get them home and into the refrigerator or freezer quickly. If these products get warm, you can have problems, both from possible food poisoning and spoilage.

The best way to thaw meat and poultry is in the refrigerator. However, if you must thaw them outside the refrigerator, put them in a sealed plastic bag under cold running water; or put them in a closed double paper bag without use of water. The trick is to allow the products to get just warm enough to thaw and still cool enough to slow down germ growth—particularly on the surface of the meat.

## **KEEP FOOD CLEAN**

If you keep germs off meat, poultry, and dairy products, you avoid problems. Keep utensils, platters, hands, and countertops soap and hot water clean. Germs are a natural part of the environment—you have to keep washing them off things, especially off your hands. Don't handle food if you have infected cuts and sores.

Be careful not to spread germs from raw meat to cooked meat. Suppose you carried the raw hamburgers to the grill on a platter; then served the cooked hamburgers on the same platter without washing it. Result: germs on your cooked 'burgers.

And, keep pets out of the kitchen. Teach children to wash their hands after playing with pets.

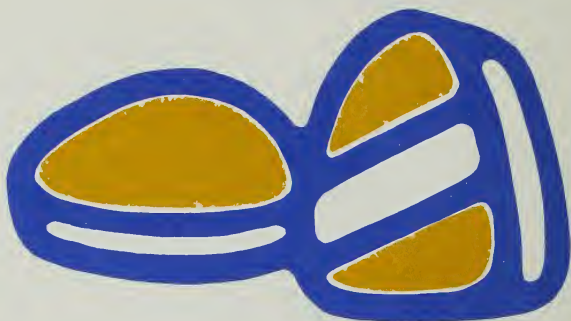
Using these three rules, Keep food HOT, Keep food COLD, Keep food CLEAN, can keep your family safe from nearly all food poisoning. However, there are a few other things you need to keep in mind about some kinds of foods.





## **HAMBURGER AND OTHER GROUND MEAT**

Ground meat should be cooked thoroughly because it's handled often in preparation and germs get mixed into it. Don't eat raw ground meat—it's neither smart nor safe.



## **HAM**

Know what kinds of ham you've bought. Some need to be cooked; others are fully cooked and can be eaten as they come from the package. Check the label, and if you have any doubts—cook it.

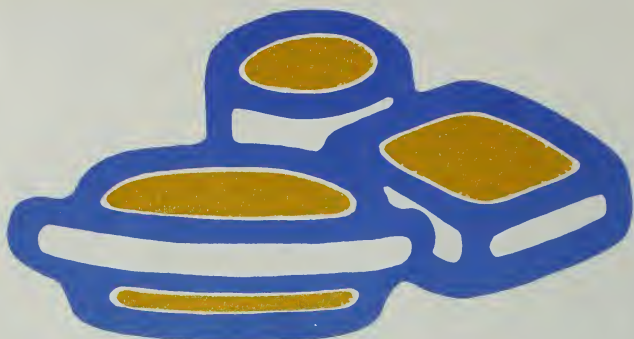


## **TURKEY, CHICKEN, DUCK, STUFFINGS**

Cook poultry products fully. If you prepare the turkey, chicken, or duck ahead of the day for cooking, store them in the refrigerator, storing giblets separately. This rule also applies to stuffings. Do not stuff the bird a day or two ahead of the day for



roasting; stuff the bird just before roasting. Refrigerate leftover poultry and stuffing in separate dishes—and as soon as possible.



## HOT DOGS AND LUNCH MEAT

These products should be stored in a refrigerator. Don't treat them as though they can't have food-poisoning germs—they can. Even if you store hot dogs and lunch meat in the refrigerator, use them up within a week. Open and close packages as few times as possible. Handle cold meats (or any meats) with a fork or tongs—not your fingers. Fingers spread germs.



## CANNED FOODS

Do not buy or use food from containers with these faults: leaking, bulging, or damaged cans; cracked jars or jars with loose or bulging lids. Do not taste or use food that has a foul odor or any food when the liquid spurts from the can when you open it. These foods could contain the rare but often fatal botulism poison. Botulism is found more often in home-canned foods than in commercial products—but be careful either way.

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Remember three key rules: Keep food hot. Keep food cold. Keep food clean. Under most circumstances, following these rules, coupled with good common sense, will protect you from food poisoning.

But if you do get sick, see your doctor. Think about how you stored, cooked, and served your food in the last few days. If you believe the problem came from outside your home, call your local health authorities.

## SOURCES OF FOOD POISONING

Hundreds of kinds of germs (bacteria) can cause food poisoning. A whole group, called *Salmonella*, come from pet dogs, cats, birds, and turtles. These germs come into your home with raw meat, poultry, eggs and other dairy products. These same products can be the source of a germ, called *Clostridium perfringens*, that develops when large amounts of food are left to stand for long periods at room temperature. Still another is *Staphylococcus aureus* or "Staph" which occurs on the skin and in the nose and throats of people. Ham, chicken, potato, and egg salads and custards are most often involved with poisoning from these germs. *Clostridium botulinum* poisoning causes the most serious effects, often fatal, but is the source of the rarest kind of food poisoning. The germs come from soil and water. These germs grow in improperly cooked meats and low-acid foods like string beans, beets and corn—particularly those canned at home.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION ON FOOD SAFETY

(Single copy free)

- Cooking and Storing Meat and Poultry (Chart)
- Brown Bag Lunches (For school, work, play)
- Facts about Hamburger (Spanish & English)
- Standards for Meat and Poultry Products, A Consumer Reference List (Spanish & English)
- Fact Sheets: *Salmonella*, *Perfringens*, *Staphylococcus*, *Botulism*. (Technical on food poisoning organisms)

Supersedes unnumbered publication, "Food Safety in the Kitchen," issued January 1974.

November 1975

